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VIRTUAL POP UP

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Pop-Up Webinar: Key Takeaways

14 May 2020

Is your thinking about return to work the same as it was a month ago? Has it changed? A few weeks ago, we were hearing that 50 percent of employees might come back relatively quickly. But now we are hearing that the percentage could be more like 25 percent in some of the big cities, and that in some cases perhaps nobody comes back until fall.

- We seem to be successful in doing business in the remote environment. We have about 98 or 99 percent of our people working remotely now. We have said all along that we are not in a hurry. So, we want to be very cautious about going back to work, and we are relying very heavily on our medical team to bring us good data in addition to the CDC guidelines as well as the changing information from the governors of the varying states we are in. We will not return before September 1. It might be that some employees will come back in smaller numbers, smaller groups, prior to that. We do not have a solid 'this is the plan' because we are constantly learning more, and things are changing every day. We are being cautious, and not so focused on a date in the future.
- We have manufacturing operations that have continued all along. Now we are really focused on our lab personnel and the essential employees who just cannot be productive at home. I would say no more than 25 percent of our people will come back initially. We are a global company, so it is really country by country, and then there are benchmarks that must be met as far as new cases which are dictating things site by site. So, maybe 25 percent starting after the Fourth of July. And then the next phase would be about 50 percent. A third phase might be around 75 percent. I bet we will not see full occupancy, or a phase four, until 2021.
- We are seeing a lot of changes in the workplace. We are trying to maintain social distancing and changing cubicles around. The real difficulty is that, despite everything we have heard in the news for a few months now and the latest updates, what we know right now is not enough. It is becoming difficult to figure out what we do when the virus is over, and we return to normal (which of course will not be the same normal). What are the long-term consequences going forward? It is very interesting right now, and everybody is doing their own thing without any unified guidance.
- Our workplace safety teams are looking at how to do social distancing with the current seating platform.

What is the decision-making structure in your company for returning to work? What role is Real Estate playing in those return-to-work decisions?

- As Director of Real Estate, I am at the table as part of our task force, which is made up of an interdisciplinary group of business leaders, driven mostly by HR and our medical team.
- We are struggling to make those decisions. We did not have a very robust work-from-home policy prior to COVID-19. Working from home was part of our culture historically, and the company was open to colleagues working remotely, but it was not necessarily a defined element per se. Now we are trying to think beyond the immediate term to the longer term. We have leases coming up and we are trying to plan for our real estate needs. We are trying to use this opportunity to facilitate an intentional work-from-home approach and capitalize on this new paradigm. People are somewhat receptive to it. We want to drive a policy that does not formally exist right now.

What are companies doing related to work-from-home furniture support?

- Short term, what we have done is a checkout program where people are able to check out whatever equipment they need so they will be as comfortable as possible: digital monitors, chairs, whatever. We do not have a long-term strategy, but this short-term strategy has been well received. It is a stop-gap solution, and it has worked well to date. The next step is: what is our long-term strategy to support working from home?

What liability does the employer have for those working at home? This could have to do with ergonomics, but it could be anything at all related to personal injury.

- We are looking at that in partnership with our legal team. It varies. Different countries have different requirements. Just yesterday we realized that if we extended our work from home in one country, we would need to start providing chairs, and potentially desks too. We have been forewarned that this might be coming. Everyone is trying to figure out how to address it.

Who must provide masks when employees come to work? The company, or the employee?

- Some companies are giving stipends to employees for purchasing their own masks. Other companies are buying cloth masks. We are looking at buying cloth masks that people can reuse. But we are taking the stance that in preparing ourselves, we might be obligated to provide them. In some countries we are starting to see mandates where the government requires us to do it. We are trying to plan for the worst-case scenario, so if the government does require them, we are ready.
- Regarding masks, while wearing a cloth or handmade mask might be better than nothing at all, not all the masks on the market are FDA approved. They might not be the best covering for your nose, or they might not be as comfortable as others. So, as you go out and look online, consider the quality of what you are looking at.
- I would second that about quality. I recently got a mask to test out, and it was not of the quality the manufacturer said it would be. I am now looking for other masks to try out. I am making a bet on what I see online, trying to get it quick-shipped to me or to others to test before we buy in big numbers.
- Keep in mind too that different masks fit different people differently. Some people are more comfortable wearing one kind vs. another kind. What we heard from our medical chief of staff this morning is that what is important is to wear it and wear it properly. Masks have different comfort levels; the main thing is to wear one. You cannot have people wearing them below their nose, because they say they cannot breathe, or because it is steaming up their glasses. The kind of headset you wear might interfere with it. There are lots of little nuances that could make it difficult for companies to provide masks that people will wear and wear properly. It might make sense to provide masks initially, but in the longer term as we get back, we would not want to do that. If

people are being asked to wear them everywhere, it would become part of what you do as a responsible citizen. I do not see why we should have to provide masks going forward.

What are different companies doing as far as taking employees' temperatures?

- Our physical security teams are evaluating whether we should be taking temperatures, and if so, whether we should be using a hand-held thermometer or a scanner.
- We have been trying to look at this worldwide in terms of where it might be required. Parts of Asia are doing it. No news on this from Europe, but we are starting to hear it might be a requirement in parts of North America, including [Colorado](#).
- Here in Chicago, we purchased some of this equipment for taking temperatures, but it is more of a volunteer testing. You walk up and do it yourself. It is more of a way for our employees to be comfortable. It is not mandated. But there is a lot of discussion by our chief medical officer about further testing before people can come into the office.

Is anyone talking about making testing mandatory to ensure worker safety?

- We have not heard about such a requirement anywhere in the world, except we do have some sales reps in China who are asked to provide documentation of testing before visiting customers. We have gone through the process of allowing our sales reps to take these tests and to expense them. They must go to a medical provider and obtain a document they bring to the facility they visit.

If you have a global portfolio, how are you keeping up with all the varying regulations around the world?

- We have an Asia person, an EU person, and then I handle the Americas and Middle East and Africa. It is up to us to reach out beyond that in terms of what laws you are seeing, what area landlords are saying about common area protocols and so on.

What are you hearing from landlords? Are they getting more involved?

- I have my team around the world going to landlords for protocols. We have been doing that for the last three or four weeks. We are beginning to see landlords provide documentation, and we have received information from about a half-dozen now. In terms of tracking all this information around the world, we are working with our legal team and planning to bring on a consulting company to help provide updates on government mandates happening around the world. We are currently doing this ourselves, but it is becoming a full-time job. We are also getting pounded by our employees who are asking us to open up offices because their countries have reduced social distancing requirements now to one meter instead of two meters and they are very eager to get back to the office. They do not understand the delay. But we want to make sure our landlords meet their obligations too. We are putting a pause on things until we are 100 percent sure before any kind of opening.
- The Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) maintains a listing of current shelter-in-place orders at the [state level](#).

The elevators seem to be a big concern. What do you do in New York? I do not have such a big problem, but I can only imagine how that will work.

- Would masks be an alternative to personal distancing in elevators?
- The main headquarters we are in here in the Bay Area is owned by a big developer on the West Coast. We saw a landlord document a week ago, and they are saying that to enter their building they will require a mask even if the local county government does not require it.
- I am in Los Angeles. Does a landlord making that kind of statement create issues? What if you have a meeting set and someone comes in not wearing a mask? Can they turn them away?

- The landlord says they will have masks available for visitors. They are trying to put the message out there to the tenants that masks will be required.
- We will all have new partnerships to manage. We will have to work together with our landlords in these environments. We want to make sure fresh air is coming into the building. We will want to make sure we have the best air filters we can get. We are finding that landlords do not want to manage social distancing in the lobbies and elevators. If you want to step into that elevator with too many people, that is up to you. The landlords are not policing it.

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